

HOBBS AND THE ABSOLUTE STATE

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that his punishment, if he deserves to be punished, is the affair of God, not of man. But while the Stuart kings claimed impunity for lawful rulers alone, he demands it for all alike. The distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* is brushed aside as irrelevant. The sovereign's task is to prevent men from killing and robbing each other. That essential duty could be as efficiently discharged by a vigorous usurper as by the anointed heir of kings. From the Parliamentary leaders he was sundered by his contempt for precedents, fundamental laws, and limited monarchy. Though both King and Parliament thus saw their most cherished convictions assailed, the latter was the more deeply outraged. For the message of the book was that Charles I, as the actual possessor of power, had the right to do what he liked, including the levying of taxes for national needs. Bishop Manwaring had been sent to the Tower for exalting the prerogative, and when his case was discussed Hobbes thought it time to cross the Channel.

The first task on reaching Paris was briefly to formulate his objections to the new philosophy of Descartes which divided the world of thought into two camps; but his mind was mainly centred on the plight of his country. From his safe anchorage he followed the crisis with anxious interest, and occupied himself with the composition of the *De Cm.*, which appeared in a very limited edition in Latin at Paris in 1642. An English translation was published in 1651 with supplementary notes as *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society*. The Dedicatory Epistle to his friend and patron the Earl of Devonshire, son of his first pupil, explains that he has been careful not to meddle with the civil wars of any particular nation. Yet the elaborate Preface admits that the

book was written with English problems in view, owing to the fact that England was ** boiling hot with questions concerning the rights of dominion and the obedience due from subjects, the true forerunners of an approaching war."

The Preface stresses the paramount importance of sound teaching. "How many kings, and those good men too, hath this one error that a tyrant king might lawfully be put to death, been the skughter of! How many throats hath this false position cut, that a prince for some causes may by some certain men be deposed ! And what bloodshed hath not this erroneous doctrine caused, that kings are not superior to but administrators for the multitude ! Lastly, how many rebellions hath this opinion been the cause of, which teacheth that the